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ABSTRACT

One hundred colleges and universities, located primarily in the Southwest, were surveyed regarding their beginning speech communication courses. The responses, 30 department syllabi and 72 completed questionnaires, tended to confirm the common speculation that both departmental titles and beginning course content are shifting toward a communication orientation. Although considerable usage of lecture-lab and peer-group approaches to course structure was evidenced, these approaches were not used in a majority of departments. A majority of departments do, however, depend upon full-time faculty to teach at least a portion of their beginning courses, and the majority reported class sizes averaging 25 or less and required written exams, outlines, and speech analyses. Brooks' and Keltner's texts tied for most popular in beginning courses, although 41 other texts were mentioned. Most responding departments reported that video taping enhanced the effectiveness of their courses and anticipated expanded use of it in the future. (EE)

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FUNDAMENTALS OF SPEECH -- OR OF COMMUNICATION -- OR OF BOTH?

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(The authors are all members of the faculty of the Department of Speech at New Mexico State University.)

Carl Rogers has said that "Changingness, a reliance on process rather than upon static knowledge, is the only thing that makes any sense as a goal for education in the modern world."[1] Change certainly is occurring and is dramatically affecting speech education and educators today: changes in financial priority, faculty loads and assignments, teaching philosophies and tools, curriculum, course structure, and possibly most influential, student needs, demands, and expectations.

Because faculty, administration, and students were expressing dissatisfaction with the content and end product of the beginning speech courses offered at New Mexico State University, that institution's Department of Speech proposed to study a re-orienting and re-structuring of the beginning courses. Partially because of the large number of non-Speech major students involved in the courses (600 students are enrolled annually in a general beginning course and another 500 in more specialized

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fundamentals courses), the University administration awarded a grant to the Department to facilitate study and possible revision of the courses during the summer of 1972.

The faculty decided that one of its initial tasks should be to attempt to determine what other departments of speech communication were doing with, about, or to their beginning courses. To this end, a one-page, 25-item survey was devised and sent to 100 colleges and universities. Because many departments are now in the process of course or curriculum revisions, or are considering such a step, the following summary of results of the NMSU survey should prove both informative and labor-saving for other departments.

The sampling was neither scientific nor random, attempting simply to concentrate on schools with enrollments, financial problems, administrative structure, or goals somewhat similar to those of New Mexico State University. These criteria resulted in some preference being shown to southwestern institutions and considerable neglect of states east of the Mississippi. More specifically, although institutions in 27 states were surveyed, approximately 60 percent of the colleges and universities polled were from the Rocky Mountain-Pacific area, from New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana on west. Another 15 percent were from the South, from Texas to Florida, and the other 25 percent were from the Midwest.

Respondents were requested to do two things: return the completed survey form and enclose copies of syllabi of their beginning courses. From the 100 schools, 72 completed, usable responses were received and 38 different syllabi from 30 institutions were enclosed. Two departments sent only the syllabi and one institution reported it no longer had a

relevant department. Thus 75 percent of possible schools responded and 72 percent sent usable survey forms.

Not only the original mailing but also response location patterns emphasized the West. Of 72 responses, 49 came from the Mountain-Pacific region, representing 80 percent of all schools sent surveys in that area; 12 responses, or 75 percent of those on the mailing list, came from the South; while 13 responses, or only 56 percent of those queried, came from the Midwest. Approached from another geographic perspective, nearly half of the responses were from California, Colorado, and Texas, while what might be termed the Southwest: California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, accounted for 63 percent of all responses.

These 72 institutions reported using 18 different names for their speech communication-related departments. Most popular as a departmental name is Speech Communication, presently employed by 25 percent of the respondents. Another 14 percent simply are Departments of Communication. On what some would term the more traditional end of the spectrum, 17 percent of the schools still label themselves Departments of Speech and another 14 percent employ Speech and Drama as their departmental title. Thus, Speech Communication or Communication seem to out-poll Speech or Speech and Drama, 39 percent to 31 percent. From another point of view, 54 percent of the departments include the word "communication" in their title; 74 percent still include the term "speech" in some form; and 33 percent employ the words "theatre" or "drama" in some combination. In summary, Speech Communication has replaced Speech as the most popular departmental title among respondents to this survey, and the term "communication" is employed for title purposes almost as frequently as the term "speech."

Forty-five of the 72 respondents reported a change of departmental title within the last seven years. The former titles had, of course, clustered around use of the term "speech," with 24 having formerly been simply Departments of Speech, 11 more having abandoned the titles Speech and Drama or Speech and Theatre, and three more having formerly been entitled Departments of Speech Arts.

The next series of questions concerned itself with whether departments had shifted toward communication orientation in name only. Of the 72 respondents, 62 reported major revisions of departmental curriculum within the last seven years, and nearly all of these (59) stated that their revisions had tended toward greater emphasis on communication theory. Fifty-two departments, or nearly three-fourths of all respondents, indicated this curricular revision had included the basic beginning level courses.

Respondents then were asked to characterize their beginning or fundamentals courses as currently taught. Although some objection was registered to dichotomizing or even trichotomizing beginning course emphasis, 31 stated that their courses were primarily communication-oriented; 22 replied that they still primarily emphasize public address; only one reported a discussion-orientation; and another 17, or nearly 25 percent, responded that they combine all three emphases: communication, public address, and discussion.

When asked whether their current beginning courses were lecture-theory or practice-experience oriented, only one of 72 reported a lecture-theory emphasis; another 15 depend upon a practice-experience structure; and the great majority, nearly 80 percent, indicated employment of a

blend of the two. As to other structural characteristics, only 27 (37.5 percent) indicated dependence upon a lecture-lab approach. Although still not a majority of respondents, slightly more departments, 33 in all, asserted that they employ peer grouping techniques in the beginning course.

Administratively, slightly more than half the departments (38) reported the teaching of their beginning courses is handled by full-time faculty. When ten more departments which employ full-time faculty and graduate assistants are added to the total, fully two-thirds of all respondents make some use of full-time faculty in their courses. The other one-third depend entirely on graduate assistants. In the same administrative vein, NMSU's faculty, accustomed to working with enrollments of 35 or more in its beginning courses, was quite interested in the fact that fully one-third of the departments have an average class size of 20 or less in beginning courses; another 33 maintain average enrollments of 21 to 25; and 12 more average 26 to 30. In short, 69 of the 72 responding departments reported average beginning class enrollment runs 30 or less, with nearly 80 percent reporting 25 or less as an average.

The great majority of departments replied, no doubt predictably, that their beginning course enrollment consists primarily of freshmen and sophomores. Of the 72 departments, 36 reported freshmen only in their beginning courses, nine more enroll sophomores only, and another 16 said their classes consist of freshmen and sophomores. Thus, nearly 85 percent of all departments said freshmen and sophomores constitute their entire beginning course enrollment. Similarly, the great majority reported their courses are required for at least a portion of enrollees. Eleven departments

indicated that all beginning course students are required to take the course; five more said it is required of most of their students, and another 51 stated it is a requirement for some of their enrollees. In only five departments is it purely elective.

Although a few exceptions were noted, most departments require the same number of meetings per week as hours of credit and, after adjusting quarter-hours to semester-hours, it was found that 50 of the 72 departments award three semester-hours for the beginning course. Nine departments grant four semester-hours, while 12 grant only two semester-hours.

Questions then turned to course content and techniques. Written requirements vary: 90 percent of the responding departments include written examinations in their beginning courses, 75 percent require written speech outlines, 60 percent require written speech analyses, and more than half, 40 departments, require all three.

Responses to the question as to adopted or recommended texts were difficult to report. Some departments use no text, others use multiple texts, some require none but recommend several, and several are in the process of changing texts. A total of 43 different texts were listed at least once, but Keltner's Interpersonal Speech Communication and Brooks' Speech Communication finished in a dead heat, with eight departments reporting adoption or at least use of each one. Next most popular texts had four votes apiece, and these included Nadeau's A Modern Rhetoric of Speech Communication, Ross' Speech Communication, and Gruner-Logue-Freshley-Huseman's Speech Communication in Society. Three departments reported use of texts by each of the following pairs of authors: Giffin-Patton, Dance-Larson, Samovar-Mills, Mudd-Sillars, and Monroe-Ehninger.

Those authors whose texts were mentioned by two departments included: McCroskey, Capp, Scheidel, Oliver-Cortwright, Fausti-McGlone, Brown-Van Riper, and Baird-Knower-Becker. Incidentally, 15 of these 17 most popular texts include the term "communication" in their titles.

The final area of concern covered by this survey was that of the uses of video-taping in the beginning course. Exactly half the respondents, 36 departments, attested to their use of video-taping and another 15, or 21 percent, indicated "some use," with this phrase covering a range from "some instructors" to "rarely." This left only 21 departments (29 percent) stating they currently make no use of video-taping. Of those who do use it, 81 percent feel it has "enhanced the effectiveness" of their courses, while another eight percent reported uncertainty about effect and 11 percent believed video usage has not enhanced effectiveness of their courses. As to type of equipment, 41 percent use portable equipment, 22 percent have permanent installations, and 37 percent have available both portable and permanent facilities. Departmental personnel operate and maintain the equipment in 72 percent of responding departments, while the other 28 percent depend upon audio-visual or other non-departmental personnel.

Only half of those respondents employing video-taping were willing to recommend a particular brand, but of these, Sony was preferred by 70 percent and Ampex by another 20 percent. Others mentioned were Shibaden and G.E., while one response characterized video-equipment as "all junk."

When asked whether they anticipated greater future use of video-taping in their departments, 71 percent answered affirmatively and another seven percent indicated "perhaps." The other 22 percent either indicated

no plans for expanded use or just did not respond. In the early days of video-taping, the primary benefit anticipated for it by many educators was as a lecture-demonstration aid.[2] However, in response to a question regarding video-taping's "greatest potential value" to the beginning course, 63 percent felt the greatest potential lay in the area of practice performance evaluation and feedback analysis, while only ten percent indicated greater potential as a lecture-demonstration aid. Another 11 percent suggested it would have equal value for both purposes.

In summary, 100 colleges and universities, located primarily in the Southwest, were surveyed regarding their beginning speech communication courses. In response, 30 departments forwarded syllabi and 72 returned completed questionnaires. Their responses tended to confirm the common speculation that both departmental titles and beginning course content are shifting toward communication orientation. Although lecture-lab and peer-grouping approaches to course structure evidence considerable usage, in neither case did a majority of departments report their use. A majority of departments do, however, depend upon full-time faculty to teach at least a portion of their beginning courses and the majority reported class size averaging 25 or less. A majority do require written exams, outlines, and speech analyses. Class membership consists largely of freshmen and sophomores and nearly all classes include at least some members who are there because the course is required for them. Most beginning courses grant three semester-hours of credit. Brooks' and Keltner's texts tied for most popular in beginning courses, although 41 other texts were mentioned, most of them including the word "communication" in their titles.

A majority of responding departments do make some use of video-taping and portable Sony equipment operated by departmental personnel was recommended. The majority felt video-taping has enhanced the effectiveness of their courses and they anticipated expanded use of it in the future, especially as an aid to performance evaluation.

As what formerly were referred to as Departments of Speech attempt to adapt to all the pressures for change operating in modern education, the aforementioned trends and preferences may provide some guidance and assistance.

[1]Carl R. Rogers, "The Interpersonal Relationship in Facilitation of Learning," Dimensions of Oral Communication Instruction, ed. Keith Erickson (Dubuque, 1970), p. 109.

[2]Ernest G. Bormann, "Television Programming for the Speech Teacher," Speech Teacher, 11 (September 1962), p. 246.